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Volume 73

Article 7

1-1-1986

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Recommended Citation

Mize, Carl W. (1986) "On the First of Six Months in Mexico," *Ames Forester*: Vol. 73 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/amesforester/vol73/iss1/7>

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On the First of Six Months in Mexico

On December 28 I left Ames for a 6 month faculty improvement leave (sabbatical) with the Forestry Department at the Universidad Autonoma Chapingo (Mexico's top agriculture school). I drove 2000 miles from Ames to Mexico City in 4 uneventful days. However, the day after I arrived at the house of some friends, I was involved in an automobile accident. Fortunately, I was the passenger or I would have had worse problems than having been knocked out and having badly sprained neck muscles. My friend and I were in a hospital and a police station for 12 hours before I was released. My friend spent 12 hours in jail before he was released. Mexican justice assumes you are guilty until proven not (or, on occasion, until a bribe is paid.)

At Chapingo I will be teaching a class to graduate students and a few faculty members on growth and yield models. I will also meet with researchers working in forest mensuration to discuss ongoing and planned research, and I hope to finish a number of projects that I started in Ames. I also plan to visit a number of areas in Mexico to see management

related research installations. Mexico has more variation in forests than almost any country in the world — from pinyon-juniper to tropical forest.

Between the accident, getting settled down in Chapingo, and a 10 day trip to Costa Rica, I have done little of what I hope to do in Mexico so far. Therefore, for the next years Ames Forester, I will have to write on the last five of six months in Mexico.

Before concluding, however, let me tell you a little about Costa Rica. I had the pleasure of being hosted by two

former graduate students, Edgar Gutierrez and Edgar Ortiz, and their families during my visit. I saw part of a small, quite topographically diverse, and beautiful (green and mountainous) country and hope to see more in the future. Costa Rica has a problem similar to what happened in Iowa. Its forests are being cleared rapidly. After the United States allowed importation of beef grown in Latin America, Costa Rica has gone from 50% forested to 20% and that is decreasing. (Think about that when you get your next fast food hamburger.) One of the most interesting parts of my visit was a day in a tropical forest with Edgar Ortiz and coworkers. They were cutting down trees to develop weight tables for tropical trees. They cut down a Cedro Macho that was 150 feet tall and 4.5 feet in DBH. While walking up the trunk of the downed tree, a worker stuck his machete into a hole and out ran a very irritated primate (somewhat lower in the evolutionary chain than a monkey and somewhat above a politician.) After voicing its irritation about the change in living arrangements, it scampered off. I spent the rest of the work day picking up leaves and branches from the tree for weighing.

My reception by the people of Costa Rica and Mexico has been very warm and friendly. I get lots of stares and occasionally a kid will pass by and say "good morning" in his or her best English — such are the drawbacks of being a

tall gringo in Latin America. Professionally and personally this has been and, I suspect, will be a very interesting, enjoyable, irritating (occasionally) and memorable part of my life. I suspect that I will be happy to return to the States, but I'm sure there is much that I will miss here.

P.S. I just learned of a possible strike by the faculty. If they strike (and the workers are talking about striking in 2 weeks), the university is SHUT DOWN. Oh well, another experience for my diary. Note: the students have been known to strike also.

PP.S. I finished the final rewrite of this in my house. The strike is on.

Carl W. Mize